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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, I really don't have anything to talk about this week. I know, you're all disappointed as much as I am! But, everything is about the same - politicians are still going head-to-head with each other, the weather is still hot and sticky, the yard is looking better, and I'm still getting older and not as physically resilient as I was ten years ago. Okay, so maybe 20 years ago!

So, let's hope for a change (for the better) in the weather patterns around the country so we can save a few pennies on the air conditioning and fans. In the meantime, stay cool, drive a little less to save on your gasoline consumption, and whatever else that might make you feel a little bit better off!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Editors' note: Due to the message drought in the newsgroups this week, there will be no column this week. See y'all next week!

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->In This Week's Gaming Section
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- Sony To Launch 80GB PS3!
Madden Football Turns 20!
Invent Superheroes!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony To Launch A 80GB PlayStation 3 for $399

Sony Corp said on Tuesday that it plans to launch in September a PlayStation 3 game console with an 80-gigabyte hard drive for $399, the same price as the PS3 with a 40-gigabyte hard drive.

"Madden Football" Marks 20 Years

With the "John Madden Football" videogame franchise nearing its 20th anniversary, publisher Electronic Arts is pulling out all the stops to celebrate the occasion.

Most notable for the music industry is a tie-in between the game's soundtrack and the "Rock Band" videogame. (EA serves as the game's distributor, which is actually published by MTV.)

Under the deal, "Rock Band" will feature music from the "Madden 09" soundtrack in its weekly downloadable songs update, a handful at a time, over several weeks, with each song carrying the "Madden" brand. Additionally, each soundtrack song will be available for sale via iTunes as part of a special "Madden" playlist.

EA is also offering fans who pre-order the game from Target an iTunes gift card worth 10 free downloads once they pick up the title.

A special 20th-anniversary collector's edition of "Madden 09" will include a version of the new "NFL Head Coach" game, which won't be available to gamers until three weeks after the "Madden 09" launch. The collector's edition will also bundle the classic "John Madden Football '93" game and exclusive video content that includes footage of cover athlete Brett Favre.

On August 12, EA will host Maddenpalooza, a one-day "Madden 09" game tournament and concert featuring such bands from the soundtrack as Good Charlotte, Airbourne and From First to Last.

DC Universe Players Invent Their Own Videogame Superheros

Sony Online Entertainment is letting comic book lovers be first to try an online videogame that lets players invent superheroes that could go on to thrash even Superman.

"DC Universe Online" will premiere at a major US comic convention next week, creative director Christopher Cao told AFP on Wednesday at the

Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.

"I can’t wait to have someone dressed as Batman playing as Batman," Cao said, referring to fanatic comic book fans.

"But this game is not just about being another person playing as Superman. It is about being equal to Superman."

Players will be able to play as any DC super characters or design a supernaturally powerful character of their own. They will then get to pursue paths of good or evil.

Each villain’s journey is shaped by player choices and leads to showdowns with Superman or Batman.

A player opting to oppose Superman in a fictional Metropolis will fall in league with the superhero’s notorious arch rival Lex Luthor.

"I wouldn’t trust Lex as far as I can throw him," Cao warned.

Online multi-player aspects of the game will let friends play together in superhero teams.

There will be some constraints on superhero looks or skills based on copyrights and trademarks of established comic book characters.

"We want you to make something original to yourself," Cao said. "Not something that is a parody of something else."

After getting feedback from comic fans for whom the game is tailored, SOE will release it for limited "beta" testing online before making it available to the world.

Nintendo Plans 60-Instrument "Wii Music"

Nintendo Co Ltd said on Tuesday it plans to launch a music game for its hit Wii game console this year, taking it into the fast-growing software segment pioneered by "Guitar Hero."

Wii sales have topped those of more technically souped up and expensive rival consoles from Microsoft Corp and Sony Corp with its motion controller that can be swung like a bat or a sword, broadening its audience well beyond hard-core video gamers.

"Wii Music" will let players simulate more than 60 different instruments. Activision’s "Guitar Hero" turned the music-playing genre into arguably the hottest category for video games.

"Guitar Hero" already plays on all three game consoles, including the Wii, helping to build the industry’s appeal among players beyond core fighting and race-style titles.

"A true paradigm shift has taken place in the global games market," Nintendo President Satoru Iwata told the E3 video game conference, the most important industry event.

A more sensitive Wii MotionPlus controller add-on also will debut next

spring with a new suite of Wii sports games from the company.

Nintendo widened the uses for the console with its Wii Fit balance board and on Tuesday said it plans to begin selling this year "Wii Speak," a group microphone that works with its Wii game console and can be used for online games.

The company also said it also plans to release a much-hyped game called "Animal Crossing: City Folk" for the Wii this year before the start of the holiday shopping season. The game lets players serve as caretakers of a virtual world that continues to function even when the game isn't being played.

This is the first time that the "Animal Crossing" franchise will be available for the Wii. It was already a hit on Nintendo's past game platform, the GameCube, and the hand-held Nintendo DS.

Nintendo said the DS will also get a version of Take Two's "Grand Theft Auto" this winter - "Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars." The company expects to have sold about 100 million DS units by the end of its fiscal year next march. It had sold about 70 million in the fiscal year through March 2008.

Nintendo Wii Is Now Top U.S. Game Console

NPD numbers are in for videogame hardware and software sales for the month of June, but the biggest news was already announced earlier today: With another 666,700 Wiis sold last month, Nintendo has taken the U.S. console lead from Microsoft, with the Xbox 360 selling less than a third of the amount of Wiis in June. The PlayStation 3, meanwhile, came in at a very comfortable second-place thanks to the considerable impact Metal Gear Solid 4.

Here's the full rundown:

June 2008 Hardware Sales

Nintendo DS - 783,000
Wii - 666,700
PlayStation 3 - 405,500
PSP - 337,4000
Xbox 360 - 219,800
PlayStation 2 - 188,800

May 2008 Hardware Sales

Nintendo Wii - 675,100
Nintendo DS - 452,600
PlayStation 3 - 208,700
Xbox 360 - 186,600

Sony and Nintendo Showcase Titles At E3

* So far during Nintendo's press event they have provided us with a few

neat surprises for the Nintendo DS. "Guitar Hero: On Tour Decades", I need a nap just saying that title, has a very cool song sharing feature. If you have the original DS version and a friend has the newer Decades version, you two will be able to play each other's songs with or against each other. Very cool idea! Expected launch date of September 2008

* "Star Wars: The Force Unleashed" is not the best looking of the version of the game coming out, but it still manages to bring the action of being able to bring major Sith pain to anyone that gets in your way. The new stylus control system looks a bit intimidating, especially since all the other versions will use a more classic controller style to control you?re Sith apprentice (except the Wii...which is pretty cool). I'll bring you my final verdict after September when the game drops.

* "Sim City Creator" was not a title I expected to hear coming to the DS again. While city creation sounds like a good idea on the go, the screens might be just a tad too small for the new title. This time around, they are bringing a new concept: managing your city through different age periods. I'll admit, I'm curious to see how it will actually play out later this year.

Sony looks to make the early 2008 non-believers of the Playstation Portable (PSP) platform eat their words with a strong set of titles this year.

* "Resistance Retribution" was the biggest surprise for me. My past experiences with first and third person shooters on the PSP has been hit or miss, but I'm a fan of Resistance, so I'm looking forward to getting my hands on this one. Seriously, if it plays half as great as it looks, this could be a surprise hit for the PSP!

* "Star Wars: The Force Unleashed" gets double billing, as it looks great on the PSP. Extra points for being able to smite, well, pretty much anyone and everyone you run into (or through as the case may be) on the go! September is going to be expensive!

* "Star Ocean: First Departure" has my attention as the Star Ocean series has delivered a great story with solid RPG gameplay. Adding the anime cut scenes to the mix for this PSP outing is simply icing on the cake. The only way this bombs this October is if they completely mess up the RPG gameplay...and I really don't think that's going to happen. There are some other cool non-gaming feature add-ons for the PSP that we will report about shortly but trust me these will truly make you think twice about *not* owning a PSP.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

No Deal! Yahoo Rejects Icahn-Microsoft Offer No. Two

Billionaire investor Carl Icahn brokered a meeting Friday evening between Microsoft and Yahoo to consider a new offer. Yahoo balked at Microsoft's $44.6 billion takeover offer in February, and Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer ended purchase negotiations in May.

On Saturday, Yahoo rejected the Icahn's proposal for Microsoft to buy Yahoo's search business for a guaranteed $2.3 billion per year over a five-year period. Yahoo recently agreed to an $800 million nonexclusive deal deal with Google for search ads, and Microsoft and Icahn wanted an exclusive contract.

The proposal also would have removed Yahoo's board of directors, including CEO Jerry Yang, and replaced them with Icahn's dissident slate.

The situation heated up last week when Icahn, in an open letter to shareholders, revealed he was talking with Microsoft executives. Microsoft had expressed frustration with the process and said it could no longer negotiate directly with Yahoo.

Icahn now wants shareholders to dissolve the current Yahoo board and create one more amenable to a Microsoft deal at the company's annual meeting Aug. 1. The proposal rejected by Yahoo would also have given Icahn, which owns five percent of Yahoo, control of the remainder of Yahoo's business, including e-mail, news and social networking.

Yang charged last week that Microsoft was out to destabilize Yahoo. He also indicated that an Icahn-led board would not be in the best interests of Yahoo.

Shareholders can expect increased attention before the annual meeting at the Freemont Hotel in San Jose, Calif., as Yang and Icahn promote their choices for directors.

Icahn's slate of directors is led by Mark Cuban, a former owner of Broadcast.com. The first priority for an Icahn-led board would be to rescind a poison pill that would allow Yahoo to release new shares of stock at a discount if a hostile party like Microsoft acquired 15 percent of its shares. That would make it more difficult for Microsoft or Icahn to acquire a majority of stock.

An Icahn victory would almost certainly cement a deal with Microsoft. But a Yang victory might not keep Microsoft or other predators at bay, leaving shareholders to wonder what's behind door number three.

Outraged Icahn Refocuses on Ousting Yahoo Board

Apparently abandoning hopes for a truce with Yahoo Inc., investor Carl Icahn sharpened his focus on replacing the Internet company's board Monday after his attempt to negotiate a deal with Microsoft Corp. was angrily rejected.

Icahn filed the final nominating papers for a slate of candidates that will oppose Yahoo's current nine directors in a showdown scheduled for an Aug. 1 shareholder vote. In separate letter to Yahoo shareholders, Icahn accused the incumbent board of being more interested in protecting its jobs than evaluating the merits of Microsoft's latest offer for Yahoo's online search operations.

Icahn, who owns a 5 percent stake in Yahoo, also accused the board of misleading shareholders about some aspects of the proposal, which was rebuffed late Saturday.

"Our company is on a precipice and our board seems ready to take the risk of seeing it topple," Icahn wrote to Yahoo shareholders.

Yahoo reiterated its disdain for Microsoft's "ludicrous" offer in its own shareholder letter, which underscored the Silicon Valley company's determination to fend off Icahn's attempted coup.

"We are prepared to let you, our stockholders, not Microsoft and Carl Icahn, decide what is in your best interests and we look forward to the upcoming vote," Yahoo Chairman Roy Bostock and Chief Executive Jerry Yang wrote.

Yang advised Yahoo's employees to brace for even more turbulence during the next few weeks, predicting that Microsoft may make more buyout proposals as Icahn ridicules the board.

"The last few months and weeks have certainly been challenging, and the waters are not likely to calm before our stockholder meeting," Yang wrote in one of two e-mails Monday to Yahoo employees and senior managers.

The standoff caused Yahoo shares to fall $1, or 4.2 percent, to finish at $22.57 in Monday's trading. The stock price had surged 10 percent last week on hopes that Icahn might be able to broker a deal between Microsoft and Yahoo after five months of on-again, off-again talks.

If Yahoo shareholders want a deal with Microsoft, Icahn said they should elect him and his other hand-picked nominees to the board.

But putting Icahn in control of Yahoo would be risky, given his inexperience in the Internet industry and the lack of any guarantee that Microsoft would be willing to pay anything near the $47.5 billion that it offered for Yahoo in its entirety in early May. That bid, worth $33 per share, was withdrawn after Yahoo sought $37 per share.

Microsoft has said it might consider making another bid for all of Yahoo if Icahn gains control of the board. Many analysts, though, believe Microsoft might not be willing to pay much more than $30 per share this time around.

Icahn, who has a long history of challenging corporate boards, has already persuaded Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer to sweeten a previous offer for Yahoo's search engine, but the way it was presented last Friday irked Yahoo's board.

Bostock derided it as a "take it or leave it" proposal that gave Yahoo just 24 hours to reach a decision. The proposed deal also was conditioned on the removal of Yahoo's entire board and top executives so Icahn would be running Yahoo's remaining business after the sale of the search engine, Bostock said.

Microsoft countered Bostock with a Monday statement that asserted Yahoo had mischaracterized its offer as "a take it or leave it ultimatum, rather than a timetable in order to move forward to intensive negotiations." The Redmond, Wash.-based software maker also said it

hadn’t insisted on any changes to Yahoo’s board.

In his letter Monday, Icahn said Yahoo could have had more time to consider Microsoft’s offer if the company agreed to postpone the Aug. 1 shareholder meeting "for a short period." He also said he was willing to let Yahoo’s current board keep an unspecified number of seats on the board.

Yang would have been banished as CEO, Icahn said, but he could have remained in the amorphous role of "chief Yahoo" that he has traditionally held.

Microsoft’s complex offer included $1 billion for Yahoo’s search engine, and guaranteed annual payments of $2.3 billion for five years. The proposal included a renewal option that would have guaranteed $1.6 billion to $3 billion annually for another five years.

The proposal also envisioned realizing about $9 per share from spinning off Yahoo’s Asian holdings. In addition, Microsoft would have loaned Yahoo $2.8 billion to help finance a special shareholder dividend of $4.50 per share and invested $3.9 billion in Yahoo.

In its response, Yahoo pointed out that it could sell its Asian assets and arrange to finance a special shareholder dividend without Microsoft’s help.

Another point of contention: Microsoft and Icahn say the latest deal’s total value would have been worth $33 per share to Yahoo. Yahoo disagreed with Microsoft’s calculations, though it did not specify how much it believed the offer was worth.

Even with Microsoft’s financial guarantees, Yahoo argues it can make more from holding on to its search engine and supplementing its advertising revenue in a proposed partnership with Google Inc. By relying on Google’s superior technology, Yahoo estimates it will increase its operating cash flow by $250 million to $450 million annually, compared to $300 million under Microsoft’s latest proposal.

The Google alliance faces a rigorous antitrust review by federal regulators and lawmakers, who have scheduled hearings Tuesday to examine whether the partnership would hamper competition in the search advertising market.

If Yahoo does a deal with Microsoft instead, Google would be owed a termination fee of up to $250 million - a cost that Yahoo said was omitted from the Microsoft proposal. Yahoo also faulted Microsoft and Icahn for not factoring the taxes that would be due on the $1 billion sale of its search engine.

Legg Mason: We’re Backing Yahoo

Legg Mason Capital Management said Friday it will back Yahoo’s existing management at the company’s shareholder’s meeting next month.

The investment firm controls about 60.7 million shares of Yahoo, which represents about 4.4 percent of outstanding Yahoo stock.

Investor Carl Icahn has proposed an alternative slate of board members, as part of a bid to get Yahoo to agree to some sort of takeover or deal with Microsoft.

"We believe the current Board acted with care and diligence when evaluating Microsoft's offers. We believe the Board is independent and focused on value creation for long-term shareholders," Bill Miller, chairman and chief investment officer of Legg Mason said in a release. But the investment house did say that it supports continuing efforts to negotiate.

"We would prefer that the company and Mr. Icahn reach a mutual agreement on the composition of the Board and end this disruptive proxy contest," the statement says.

Icahn is backing a change of management in part because he does not think Microsoft can negotiate with the current board. But Legg Mason said that is an unacceptable reason to change management.

"While boards are there to protect shareholder interests, shareholders own the company. If Microsoft wants to acquire Yahoo, it can make the terms and conditions of its offer public. If Yahoo shareholders support it, I am confident the Board of Yahoo will accept it," Miller said in the statement.

EBay Scores Victory in Internet Trademark Case

EBay Inc scored a major legal victory on Monday when a federal judge absolved it of taking more steps to police fake Tiffany jewelry sold on its website and held that brand owners are ultimately responsible for protecting their own trademarks.

All of Tiffany's trademark infringement claims against eBay (EBAY.O) were rejected - a knockout blow to the four-year-old lawsuit that had been closely watched by Internet companies as well as luxury goods makers seeking to stop the sale of counterfeit products online. The ruling is expected to be appealed.

Tiffany & Co had alleged that eBay turned a blind eye to the sale of fake Tiffany silver jewelry on its site. EBay countered it was not in a position to determine which goods were knock-offs of the prestigious New York brand and had said the jeweler did not adequately participate in eBay's programs that help brand owners prevent fraud.

The judge, in a 66-page decision following a non-jury trial in U.S. District Court in Manhattan last November, said he was "not unsympathetic" to Tiffany and others who have invested in building their brands only to see them exploited on the Web. But he said the law was clearly on eBay's side.

"It is the trademark owner's burden to police its mark and companies like eBay cannot be held liable for trademark infringement based solely on their generalized knowledge that trademark infringement might be occurring on their websites," wrote Judge Richard Sullivan.

EBay called the ruling a "victory for consumers," saying it "appropriately establishes that protecting brands and trademarks is the

primary burden of rights owners."

"All I can say to that is that I'd be surprised if Tiffany did not appeal this decision," said Mark Aaron, Tiffany's vice president of investor relations.

He said Tiffany was "shocked and deeply disappointed" by the ruling, which "allows sellers of counterfeit goods on eBay to victimize consumers."

Jeffrey Lindsay, an Internet analyst with Bernstein Research, said the ruling - coming on the heels of a similar case in France that resulted in an eBay defeat - allayed some Wall Street concerns of snowballing lawsuits.

"Anything short of victory for eBay would probably have added to investor concerns that there would be a slew of lawsuits down the pike," said Lindsay.

Tiffany had wanted eBay to preemptively take down listings that offered five or more of its items and immediately suspend sellers Tiffany suspected of fraud. It had also sought monetary damages from eBay. The judge rejected all claims.

Ebay, which has been trying to increase trust between buyers and sellers in its main auction business, has increased spending on technology and people to stem the sale of fake goods on its site.

San Jose, California-based eBay says it takes down more than 90 percent of fake goods from its site within four hours of their posting after being alerted by trademark holders.

Judge Sullivan found that Tiffany's claim ultimately failed due to Tiffany's choice to sue eBay, rather than individual sellers, and because eBay stops fraudulent listings after being alerted to violations.

U.S. courts have largely taken the position that it is the trademark owner's responsibility to determine which goods sold online are counterfeit. Under this view, a party such as eBay is liable only when it fails to remove offending items once alerted by the trademark owner.

Still, case law has been spotty and at times inconsistent.

In Europe, courts have sometimes taken a more protectionist view. A French court earlier this month ordered eBay to pay $61 million to LVMH (LVMH.PA), parent of the Christian Dior and Louis Vuitton brands, over fake luxury handbags and perfumes on its site. Ebay is appealing.

EBay has argued that a more open marketplace is key for vibrant Internet commerce.

"This would have ended up foreclosing an entire category of eCommerce," said Steve DelBianco, executive director of high- tech industry group NetChoice Coalition, speaking of the sale of trademark items on the Web.

EBay argued the issue of counterfeit goods is a red herring. Luxury brands, according to eBay, are more interested in keeping a tight rein on distribution of their goods than in keeping knock-offs off eBay's site.

Brand experts say the issue is far from over.

"This is only one round of a very long bout," said Milton Pedraza, chief executive of ratings and research group Luxury Institute, who said that, ultimately, it will be consumers who will demand authentication of goods purchased online.

Admins Locked Out of San Francisco’s I.T. System

San Francisco’s computer network was still being held hostage Thursday, allegedly by a disgruntled employee who programmed the system with a password only he knows. Terry Childs, 43, was jailed Sunday night. He has a 25-year-old criminal record in Kansas for aggravated robbery that had been disclosed at the time he was hired.

San Francisco’s IT department was trying to regain control of the network, which was running and handling everything from the mayor’s e-mail to San Francisco’s electronic court records. Currently all IT administrators are denied access.

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, Mayor Gavin Newsom said administrators were blocked from making changes to the city’s computer network, so if the system were to crash, workers could not undertake repairs or upgrades.

Cisco Systems has been consulted, and estimates are that in the worst case, the network could be rebuilt from scratch in six to eight weeks. Childs could be liable for the costs.

Childs pleaded not guilty Thursday to four counts of tampering with a computer network. His lawyer, public defender Mark Jacobs, said his client’s $5 million bail was inappropriate. But city prosecutors said the bail is high because Childs endangered public safety.

Childs could be stripped of his public defender, since there might be a conflict of interest because the defender’s office is part of the city and county of San Francisco.

Officials searched Childs’ car and home, concerned he may have given the access code to an accomplice who could have destroyed hundreds of thousands of sensitive documents. No evidence was found to suggest a collaborator.

According to city officials, on June 20 Childs began photographing the new head of security for the city’s technology department after she announced an audit of access to the system. According to authorities, she believed Childs had given himself exclusive access to the system and could read supervisors’ e-mails about his conduct.

The security director reportedly became so concerned about Childs’ behavior that she locked herself in her office and called authorities, leading to his arrest.

San Francisco System Lockout Called ’Misunderstanding’

The lawyer representing an engineer who allegedly locked up San Francisco's computer system said Friday that he has been willing to reveal the password all along.

Terry Childs, 43, has been held on $5 million bond and pleaded not guilty Thursday to four counts of tampering with a computer network.

Erin Crane, Childs' court-appointed lawyer, called the case a big misunderstanding and said Childs has "been willing to hand over the password since Tuesday." He said negotiations are ongoing with city officials.

That was news to officials in the city's IT department, who told the San Francisco Chronicle they did not know of any offer to turn over the password. A spokesperson for District Attorney Kamala Harris would not comment on any talks.

The city's IT department has been trying to regain control of the network, which handles everything from the mayor's e-mail to San Francisco's electronic court records. All IT administrators were denied access.

Estimates were that, if necessary, the network could be rebuilt from scratch in six to eight weeks. Childs could be liable for the costs.

Officials searched Childs' car and home in Pittsburg, concerned that he could have given the access code to an accomplice to destroy sensitive documents. However, no evidence of a collaborator was found.

Childs was part of a team that built the city's computer system and the trouble reportedly started June 20 when he photographed the new head of security for the IT department after she began an audit of access to the system. She reportedly believed Childs was reading supervisors' e-mails about his conduct. On July 9, Childs was ordered to leave work for alleged insubordination.

The security director reportedly became so concerned about Childs' behavior that she locked herself in her office and called authorities, leading to his arrest.

New York Man Gets 30 Months in Prison for Spamming AOL

A Brooklyn man was sentenced to 30 months in prison on Tuesday for sending spam e-mails to more than 1.2 million subscribers of America Online in a scheme that foiled the Internet company's spam-filtering system.

Adam Vitale, 27, was sentenced in federal court in Manhattan after pleading guilty more than a year ago to breaking anti-spam laws. He was also ordered to pay $180,000 to AOL in restitution.

Vitale was caught making a deal with a government informant to send junk e-mails - known as spam - that advertised a computer security program in return for 50 percent of the product's profits, prosecutors said.

"Spamming is serious criminal conduct; this is not a teenager engaging

in child’s play," U.S. District Judge Denny Chin told Vitale as he sentenced him. Vitale earlier apologized and said he had learned a lesson.

Prosecutors said Vitale had 22 prior convictions and had also helped run an online prostitution ring on the Web site www.craigslist.com, but he has not been criminally charged.

In the spam e-mail case, Vitale and another man, Todd Moeller, defeated AOL’s filter system by using several different computer servers to relay the e-mails and changed the e-mail header information to ensure the spam e-mails could not be traced back to them.

Moeller, of New Jersey, was sentenced last November to 27 months for his role in the scheme.

Court papers said that in less than a week in August 2005, Vitale and Moeller sent e-mails on behalf of the informant to more than 1,277,000 addresses of subscribers at AOL, the online division of Time Warner Inc.

Web-based Program Gives The Blind Internet Access

Blind people generally use computers with the help of screen-reader software, but those products can cost more than $1,000, so they’re not exactly common on public PCs at libraries or Internet cafes. Now a free new Web-based program for the blind aims to improve the situation.

It’s called WebAnywhere, and it was developed by a computer science graduate student at the University of Washington. Unlike software that has to be installed on PCs, WebAnywhere is an Internet application that can make Web surfing accessible to the blind on most any computer.

The developer, Jeffrey Bigham, hopes it lets blind people check a flight time on a public computer at the airport, plan a bus route at the library or type up a quick e-mail at an Internet cafe.

To get WebAnywhere running, a blind person has to manage to get online, which can be complicated on a computer not already set up to give verbal feedback. But Bigham’s research found that Web-savvy blind people often know plenty of keyboard tricks and when to ask for help.

Once online, a blind Web surfer can use the WebAnywhere browser, which can link to and then read out loud any page - as long as the computer has speakers or a headphone jack. The program can skip around the section titles, tab through charts or read the page from top to bottom.

WebAnywhere could benefit from some tweaking but it’s a big improvement over a total lack of public access, says Lindsay Yazzolino, a blind Brown University student who has a summer job at the University of Washington.

Yazzolino, 19, would like to see a better search function and fewer keystrokes required for navigation around Web pages, but she loves the fact that the program is free.

Bigham says he hopes others will make improvements to his program, which is open-source to invite tinkering. He doesn’t have a personal

connection to the issue of computer accessibility - except through his fellow students who are blind - but recognizes the area as wide open for programmers.

His faculty adviser, professor Richard Ladner, hopes a commercial search engine will adopt WebAnywhere as a module. Ladner's next dream is for Web developers to keep blind people in mind when they design their pages - a change that could make information easier for everyone to find.

HP's New PhotoSmarts Make Printing Portable

On Tuesday, Hewlett-Packard announced three new additions to its Photosmart printer line, including two portable printers and one stationary five-ink model.

The HP Photosmart A630 features a 4.8-inch touchscreen, which, according to HP, is the largest available on any portable printer. The A630 also offers built-in features some 300 built-in tools for editing, drawing, and touching up photos, without the aid of a PC.

The other portable printer, the Photosmart A530, meanwhile, is the only $99 printer that prints photos up to 5x7-inches, according to HP. The printer also offers clipart and borders for enhancing photos.

The HP Photosmart D5460 is a stationary printer with a five-ink printing system, which, according to HP, can produce quality formerly only available with six-ink systems. It also features a 1,5-inch color screen, memory card slots, CD and DVD printer, and Smart Web Printing, which offers easy printing directly from the Internet.

The A630 and A530 are both available in August for $149 and $99, respectively. The D5460 is available now for $99.

Is the Desktop PC Making a Comeback?

Mobile computers such as laptops have had tremendous momentum in the market the past few years, but the stodgy desktop may be making a comeback.

Converge, a U.S. company that does much of its work with chip spot markets, noted in its most recent report Wednesday that a rare shortage has emerged in desktop microprocessors.

"The story of the third quarter has been the dramatic resurgence of shortages in the desktop market after a sustained period of relative calm," the report says.

Most microprocessors are sold by contract to major buyers such as PC vendors Hewlett-Packard and Dell, but often some chips, including excess inventory, are sold to the global spot market. For chips such as DRAM, the spot market can often be an early indicator of a trend, but that's not always the case in the microprocessor spot market because it is far smaller.

The report says the phase-out of an older microprocessor family caused some product shortages last year and that may be happening again this year with Intel’s Pentium E series Conroe family.

Still, there is other anecdotal evidence of something going on in the desktop market.

Gartner noted Wednesday in its second quarter PC market report that desktop PC shipments gained traction among professional users in the U.S. The market researcher says that may be occurring because of growing economic uncertainty in the U.S.

Since desktop PCs cost less than mobile PCs, they are a less expensive option for businesses with tighter IT budgets, Gartner said.

Intel, the world’s largest chip maker and provider of around four-fifths of all computer microprocessors, also noted some strength in desktop PCs during a conference call after its second quarter results, which were announced Tuesday.

Executives at the company said prices for its desktop microprocessors remained constant in the second quarter because of solid demand for desktop products in emerging markets as well as in corporations. Prices for Intel microprocessors used in mobile devices fell.

Over the past few years, the mobile PC market has been where most of the growth has been, while market researchers have noted very little growth in shipments of desktop PCs.

In fact, Intel even noted that the number of microprocessors aimed at laptop computers it shipped in the second quarter beat desktop microprocessor shipments for the first time.

"We saw notebook unit shipments cross over desktops in the overall client PC category in the second quarter," said Paul Otellini, Intel’s president and CEO, during a conference call. "What I think we’re seeing is a fundamental shift to notebooks."

The crossover occurred six months sooner than Intel expected, he said.

Printer Dots Raise Privacy Concerns

The affordability and growing popularity of color laser printers is raising concerns among civil liberties advocates that your privacy may not be worth the paper you’re printing on.

More manufacturers are outfitting greater numbers of laser printers with technology that leaves microscopic yellow dots on each printed page to identify the printer’s serial number - and ultimately, you, says the San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation, one of the leading watchdogs of electronic privacy.

The technology has been around for years, but the declining price of laser printers and the increasing number of models with this feature is causing renewed concerns.

The dots, invisible to the naked eye, can be seen using a blue LED light

and are used by authorities such as the Secret Service to investigate counterfeit bills made with laser printers, says Lorelei Pagano, director of the Central Bank Counterfeit Deterrence Group.

privacy advocates worry that the little-known technology could ensnare political dissidents, whistle-blowers or anyone who prints materials that authorities want to track.

"There’s nothing about this technology that limits its application to counterfeit investigations," says Seth Schoen, a computer programmer with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. "Some people who aren’t doing anything wrong may have their privacy threatened." Schoen’s tests have found the dots produced by 111 color laser printers made by 13 companies including Xerox, Canon, Hewlett-Packard, Epson and Brother.

The dots are produced only on laser devices and not ink-jet printers, which are most commonly used at home. But laser printers, which produce more durable images, are becoming increasingly popular as their price has dropped to as low as $300, says Angele Boyd, a vice president of IDC Research.

Although laser printers made up only 4% of the 33 million printers sold last year in the USA, their sales have been growing by double digits since 2004, Boyd says.

The technology began as laser printers were first produced in the mid-1980s and governments and banks feared an explosion of counterfeiting, Xerox spokesman Bill McKee says. "In many cases, it is a requirement to do business internationally that the printers are equipped with this technology," McKee says.

The dots tell authorities the serial number of a printer that made a document. In some cases, it also tells the time and date it was printed, Pagano says. "The Secret Service is the only U.S. body that has the ability to decode the information," she says.

Printer makers "cooperate with law enforcement" and will tell authorities where a printer was made and sold, McKee says.

The Secret Service uses the dots only to investigate counterfeiting, agency spokesman Ed Donovan says.

Reps Give Thumbs Down to Sniffing Online Activity

Should ISPs and Web site owners be banned from keeping track of your online activity just as the Post Office is banned from going through your snail mail?

Absolutely, according to several members of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, who grilled the owner of a behavioral advertising company Thursday over the inability of consumers to opt out of Internet monitoring.

Specifically, the committee was concerned about a technology known as deep-packet inspection, a technique that allows for the detailed inspection of data as it travels across the Internet. ISPs can use it to filter out the illegal transfer of copyrighted material or harmful

viruses and spam, but providers like Comcast have come under fire for allegedly using the technology to block certain file-sharing applications.

"As opposed to individual Web sites that know certain information about visitors to its websites and affiliates, deep packet inspection technologies can indicate every Web site a user visits and much more about a person's web use," said subcommittee chairman Edward Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat.

"In my view, consumers deserve, at a minimum: clear, conspicuous, and constructive notice about what the broadband provider's use of deep packet inspection will be; meaningful, 'opt-in' consent for such use; and no monitoring or data interception of those consumers who do not grant consent for such use," Markey said.

Much of the subcommittee's fire was reserved for Bob Dykes, chief executive of NebuAd, an online advertising company that aggregates information to serve up targeted ads.

The Post Office is not allowed to go through your mail and neither should your ISP, Markey said. The idea that NebuAd might be exempt because it is a private company is not a valid argument because private companies like FedEx and UPS are also banned from going through consumers' packages.

When asked by Markey to support to an opt-in standard for authorizing the use of consumers' data, Dykes deferred.

"I would say to characterize opt-in or opt-out is probably not as important as saying there should be a very robust notice" of what NebuAd is doing with a persons' data, he said.

Markey was not convinced. "No, you have to get the consumer to say yes," he pushed. "Do you support that?"

"I think you're forcing me into one of those 'have you stopped beating your wife?' questions," Dykes responded.

"Have you stopped beating the consumer?" Markey asked.

At this point, ISPs include notices of impending deep-packet inspection as bill inserts or in e-mails to customers, Dykes said.

His company is working with the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) to instead have those notices pop when a user signs on to their account. That notice would tell the customer that their activity would be tracked and give them the option to opt out. If they took no action, however, their activity would be tracked by default.

That seemed to be the point of contention between Dykes and several Democratic members of the subcommittee.

"I think most Americans would believe the information they have about themselves is theirs. Just because I belong to an ISP doesn't give me the right to be tracked," said Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich. "Why should the burden be on the American consumer?"

"I think that there should be a common set of laws around privacy in this country that generally treats various techs in the same manner,"

Dykes said.

"The idea that anyone can examine what you do, where you go; I think goes against everything that the country's been founded on and that most Americans believe," said Rep. Mike Doyle, a Pennsylvania Democrat. "And I don't care if an ISP is doing it or Google's doing it, it shouldn't be happening."

Ranking member Cliff Stearns, a Florida Republican, defended Dykes somewhat by pointing out that online notifications could be burdensome.

"If Congress mandates that, isn't it possible that when I go on the Internet; there would be a constant dialogue box and every consumer will have to click in and click out" of every Web site, Stearns asked.

"It doesn't have to be a box on every Web site you visit, just [one notice from] your ISP," Doyle countered.

This has been a rough month for Dykes and NebuAd. He faced the firing squad in the Senate last week where Sen. Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat, compared NebuAd's activities to wiretapping.

At that hearing, Dykes clashed with Leslie Harris, president and CEO of CDT. Dykes said he believed that data collection on the Internet could indeed be truly anonymous but Harris disagreed, pointing to AOL, which in 2006 mistakenly released 20 million search queries that included identifiable data.

NebuAd and CDT are now working together to reach a "common ground" on consumer notification, Dykes said. The two groups met Wednesday and came to a "high-level understanding" about how to allow Web users to opt-out of NebuAd's targeted advertising.

Earlier this week, the House Energy and Commerce Committee penned a letter to Embarq Corporation regarding a test the company recently performed in conjunction with NebuAd to create consumer profiles based on consumers' web browsing data.

The committee asked Tom Gerke, CEO of Embarq, to provide detailed information on when and where it conducted its test with NebuAd, whether Embarq conducted a legal analysis of the practice, and its policy on opt-in vs. opt-out.

Gerke was asked to respond by July 21.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) voiced its opposition to deep-packet inspection Thursday.

"Every time we visit the Internet, everything we read, everything we see; all of it is up for grabs with DPI," Timothy Sparapani, ACLU senior legislative counsel, said in a statement. "If that information is obtained by the government, then you have exactly zero privacy online."

E-mail Public Documents Get Erased, Disappear

Laws in all but a handful of states give the public access to government e-mail. But what if that e-mail was intentionally deleted or routinely

purged?

In Hawaii, Gov. Linda Lingle’s office allowed e-mails of her top aide to be purged. In North Carolina, Gov. Mike Easley’s administration allegedly ordered state workers to delete their e-mail correspondence with his office. And in Missouri, lawsuits claim Gov. Matt Blunt’s office deleted e-mails and ordered the destruction of backup e-mail tapes.

These and other cases raise concerns that millions of public records in the form of e-mails may be disappearing before anyone outside government can read them.

Experts say e-mail archiving systems and better training for state employees will help ensure e-mail is not lost.

"We’re not saying states are trying to do something bad," said Kevin Joerling, a certified records manager with the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, International, a trade group. "But they don’t understand how important e-mail records can be, and they have to be protected."

A 50-state survey by the Associated Press of government e-mail retention earlier this year found a wide variety of laws and practices, with the vast majority of states officially treating e-mail like printed documents. But most of the states with e-mail laws allow officials to choose which ones to turn over in Freedom of Information requests and to decide on their own when e-mail records are deleted.

In Hawaii, a recently settled blackmail case that involved undisclosed allegations against Lingle’s former chief of staff, Bob Awana, hinged on e-mails.

The blackmailer, Indian national Rajdatta Patkar, was sentenced last October to a year in prison for demanding $35,000 by e-mail from Awana. According to Patkar’s lawyer, Pamela Byrne, her client discovered e-mails that showed two women served as escorts for Awana and a Hawaii businessman on an official state trip by Lingle to the Philippines.

Awana resigned after Patkar’s arrest, saying nothing about the case, but Lingle has denied that he did anything wrong on a state time.

The Associated Press requested calendars and e-mails from Awana’s government e-mail account in February to determine whether they could provide evidence of misconduct on state trips to the Philippines in 2005 and 2006. But the governor’s office said the e-mail had been routinely purged.

Russell Pang, chief of media relations for the Lingle administration, said in May that government e-mail records are deleted every two months. He said Awana did not save e-mails to his hard drive or print them out and that Awana’s computer was cleared for use by someone else after Awana resigned last June.

Only a handful of e-mails related to Philippine trips were disclosed to the media, none of them providing evidence of any wrongdoing.

William Tolson, director of legal solutions for Mimosa Systems, Inc., a California-based company that sells e-mail archiving software, said there is no reason states can’t retain e-mails longer.

Tolson said corporations have archiving systems that store hundreds of millions of e-mails for years.

"If companies do it, why can’t the government?" he asked.

A state panel in North Carolina recommended in May that e-mail messages be stored for at least five years. It also endorsed the development of an archive system for e-mails that need to be retained even longer.

As governor, Easley created the group to study the state’s e-mail storage polices after his administration was accused of ordering state employees to delete their e-mail correspondence with the governor’s office.

Easley has said there is no evidence such a systematic destruction took place.

But some state officials and records managers say not all e-mails could or even should be retained.

Guidelines issued by the state comptroller in Hawaii allow e-mail that state officials say is not a record, such as informal messages about grabbing lunch or a notice about a holiday party, to be deleted from the e-mail system when "no longer needed for operational purposes."

Joerling said if state agencies retain all e-mails without sorting out government records from more mundane correspondence, they may have trouble retrieving information in response to an official request.

"It’s like trying to find a needle in a haystack," he said.

Laurence Brewer, director of the life cycle management division at the federal National Archives and Records Administration, said an agency’s records may be used against it in a lawsuit. So keeping records longer than guidelines recommend could also be a liability, he said.

Hawaii State Archivist Susan Shaner said there is simply too much e-mail to save it all.

But open government activists say it’s better to err on the side of retaining too much information than risk losing records. Some argue that all e-mails sent and received on government e-mail accounts amount to a public record.

Hawaii state Sen. Les Ihara said technology has made storage space for e-mails and other computer files inexpensive.

"You can store virtually everything," Ihara said. "The rationale that we need to purge in order to save space is moot."

Romanian Authorities Arrest Cybercrime Suspects

Authorities have arrested more than 20 people in Romania who are suspected of running online fraud schemes, according to media reports.

The Tuesday arrests were confirmed by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has been working with Romanian officials on

cybercrime in recent months. The FBI would say only that the agency is aware of the arrests and because "this is an ongoing matter, we will have no further comment at this time."

Romanian news reports suggested the number of people arrested there was between 21 and 24. Mediafax.ro reported that the suspects were accused of stealing identities online, in apparent phishing or auction-fraud schemes, and that they had taken US$640,000 from non-Romanians. Several U.S. Web sites, including eBay, were targets of the fraud, according to news reports.

The group’s alleged leader, Romeo Chita, was arrested in an apartment owned by a Romanian lawmaker, Mediafax.ro reported.

Gary Warner, director of research in computer forensics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, applauded the arrests in a blog post Wednesday.

The arrests are "another example of the successful international cooperation" between the U.S. and Romanian law enforcement, he wrote.

"How long is the long arm of the law?" Warner wrote. "It’s at least long enough to reach from eBay headquarters to Romania."

Warner posted video of three of the arrests on his blog.

In May, U.S. and Romanian authorities announced that 38 people in the two countries had been charged with using complicated Internet phishing schemes to steal thousands of credit and debit-card numbers. Two related phishing schemes had ties to organized crime, the U.S. Department of Justice said then.

Phishing involves sending e-mail messages that look like official correspondence from banks or credit-card vendors in an attempt to get recipients to go to a fake Web site and enter their account numbers.

New Service Tracks Missing Laptops for Free

Lose your laptop these days and you lose part of your life: You say good-bye to photos, music and personal documents that cannot be replaced, and if it’s a work computer, you may be the source of a very public data breach.

But now, researchers at the University of Washington and the University of California, San Diego, have found a way to give you a shot at getting your life back. On Monday, they plan to launch a new laptop tracking service, called Adeona that is free and private.

Named after the Roman goddess credited with guiding children back to their parents, Adeona uses software that has been under development for the past year.

Here’s how it works: A user downloads the free client software onto a laptop. That software then starts anonymously sending encrypted notes about the computer’s whereabouts to servers on the Internet. If the laptop ever goes missing, the user downloads another program, enters a username and password, and then picks up this information from the

servers, specifically a free storage service that has been around for several years, called OpenDHT.

The Mac version of Adeona even uses a freeware program called isightcapture to take a snapshot of whomever is using the computer.

Adeona doesn't exactly give you the address and phone number of the person who's stolen your laptop, but it does provide the IP (Internet Protocol) address that it last used as well as data on what nearby routers it used to connect to the Internet. Armed with that information, law enforcement could track down the criminal, said Tadayoshi Kohno, an assistant professor at the University of Washington. "Once you actually recover information about your laptop...you probably want to take this information to the police."

Aviel Rubin, a professor at Johns Hopkins University who is familiar with the Adeona project says he wants to download the code when Adeona goes live. "Not all the information that you're going to get in every circumstance is going to find the laptop or catch the bad guy," he said. "But this is a pretty big step forward."

"Without this, you could pretty much kiss the laptop good-bye," he added.

When the team first started work on Adeona it wasn't the tracking and retrieval of missing laptops that piqued their curiosity. It was a privacy problem: How could they build a laptop tracking service that was so private that even the people running the service could not discover the location of the laptop? That information would be accessible only to the user, Kohno said.

The researchers believe that commercial tracking services are unappealing because the services could theoretically be used to keep tabs on legitimate users. "It's not exactly clear what they're doing since their systems are closed source," said Thomas Ristenpart, a graduate student with the University of California's Department of Computer Science, who worked on the project.

On the other hand commercial products such as Absolute Software's Lojack for Laptops have many features that Adeona lacks. For example their software is much harder to remove from the laptop, and these companies are already in the business of working with police to recover stolen laptops. Lojack costs about $40 per year. Another service, Brigadoon's PC PhoneHome goes for a one-time $30 fee.

Because Adeona ships with an open-source license, anyone can take the code and improve it or even sell it. The researchers say they're hoping that software developers will build all kinds of new features such as GPS- (Global Positioning System) aware tracking systems for new platforms such as the iPhone.

Later this month, the Adeona team will give a technical presentation at the Usenix Security Symposium in San Jose, California.

The University of Washington's Kohno said he'd be happy if some of the existing vendors started using the code. "I believe that privacy for laptop tracking systems is important," he said. "I would really like to see existing commercial services provide high levels of privacy."

Cyberbullying Grows Bigger and Meaner With Photos, Video

Ricky Alatorre doesn’t know which classmate surreptitiously hoisted a cellphone camera and snapped his picture or exactly when it happened.

All Ricky, 16, knows is the fuzzy yet distinguishable portrait of him in English class showed up on MySpace, on a page that claimed to be his. And the fake profile, titled "The Rictionary," not only identified his school but also said Ricky loved dictionaries - a swipe at his school smarts - and was gay (he’s not), one of the most common schoolyard taunts.

Tall, big and bookish, Ricky, who lives on a farm in Lake County, Ind., had been picked on since he was in kindergarten.

Insults flung in the heat of anger always inflict some pain. But words - and pictures - posted on the Internet, where they can be seen by anyone, have taken bullying to a whole new level.

"I was completely devastated," Ricky says.

As younger and more kids get their hands on cellphone and digital cameras and nearly ubiquitous high-speed Internet connections, cyberbullying is ramping up and taking new forms.

No longer are threats, taunts and insults relegated to the written word in chat rooms and instant messages. Now teens, children and sometimes adults are adding pictures and videos to their bullying arsenal and posting them on sites such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, where anyone can see them.

And bullying has led to real consequences - from fights to teen suicides, or what some label "bullycides." States are beginning to take action with tough new laws targeting those who use electronic means to bully.

Online harassment of American young people ages 10 to 17 increased 50% (from 6% to 9%) from 2000 to 2005, according to the latest research available, a watershed report by the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes Against Children Research Center. And the number of young people who said they had "made rude or nasty comments to someone on the Internet" increased from 14% to 28% in the same period.

But there hasn’t been nearly enough research on the subject, says Corinne David-Ferdon, a health scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Compounding the frustration is that children often fail to report bullying. They fear that tormentors will become angrier and bully them more or worry that if they report being bullied over the Internet or on a cellphone, their phone and Internet privileges will be revoked.

"This is an emerging public-health problem" that needs attention, David-Ferdon says. The problem gained visibility with news about high school girls getting in trouble after posting school fights on YouTube.

Five girls from Lakeland, Fla., face charges over an incident March 30 in which they are accused of participating in the beating of a 16-year-old acquaintance in retaliation for her saying nasty things

about them on MySpace. They videotaped the beating and planned to post it on MySpace and YouTube, says Chip Thullbery, state attorney spokesman in Polk County.

The sheriff decided to release it to deal with news media interest, the Associated Press reported.

"Girlfight" videos have become so ubiquitous that the search term "girlfight" brings up thousands of videos on YouTube.

"You're bullied twice," says Nancy Willard, author of Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens and Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats. "You're bullied in the real world with a physical attack, and then you're bullied online with humiliation. It's very hurtful. Very, very hurtful."

In another publicized case, 13-year-old Megan Meier killed herself in 2006 after receiving devastating messages from someone masquerading as a teen boy who had developed an online relationship with her. Authorities prosecuted an adult, Lori Drew, 59, of Dardenne Prairie, Mo., on charges that she was behind the hoax. Drew pleaded not guilty last month in Los Angeles federal court.

"Cyberbullying is getting much worse, and it's affecting a lot of kids," says Bill Bond, a former principal who tours the country speaking to principals about school violence on behalf of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

"Cyberbullying can be even more destructive" than face-to-face bullying "because you get a sense that the whole world is being exposed to what is being said to you."

That's just how Ricky feels.

"When they put it on the Internet, it's like they took everything and multiplied it by an astronomical number," he says. "It's one thing if it's a mean thing that somebody put in my school paper because that's contained within a small area. Only a certain number of people will see that. But when you put it on the Internet, you are opening it up to everyone in the world."

Ricky called his mother the spring day he discovered the profile and had her pick him up from school. He didn't have many friends to begin with. But soon he found himself more alone than ever.

"I had thought about suicide," he says. "It looked very welcoming at certain times." But he says his family is helping him cope.

His mother, Peggy Alatorre, 44, tells her son he just has to make it through two more years of high school. But she's worried. "Does it hurt him forever? You bet. Ricky has been crushed."

In the past few months, Alatorre has done everything she could think of to remedy the situation. She talked to school officials. She contacted the police, the FBI, local politicians. "I even e-mailed (President) Bush."

MySpace eventually removed the profile - only after several weeks of pestering the site, she says. Other than that, "everybody is passing the buck."

Mike Chelap, assistant vice principal of Lowell High School, where Ricky attends, says he can’t discuss personal matters about students, but the school began an anti-bullying program and will implement it in the fall.

Barbara Paris, now principal of Canyon Vista Middle School in Austin, became an activist against cyberbullying after a girl at another school where she worked had become suicidal after she was the victim of racial and sexual taunts online. "When ... I had a child who was suicidal because of people like me not doing anything about it, I had a paradigm shift right there."

Politicians are starting to take note. Thirty-six states have anti-bullying laws, according to Paris’ watchdog group, Bully Police. And several are specifically starting to address cyberbullying. On June 30, Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt signed an anti-Internet harassment law in the wake of Megan Meier’s death.

Also last month, Florida Gov. Charlie Crist signed the Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act. The tough anti-cyberbullying law came after the 2005 suicide of 15-year-old Jeffrey, who his mother says had endured three years of torturous harassment over the Internet.

To those who say bullying is just part of childhood, Jeffrey’s mother, Debbie Johnston of Cape Coral, Fla., says that’s "like saying rape is part of marriage."

Jodee Blanco, who grew up the victim of bullies, agrees with the sentiment. An author of two books on her own bullying experience, she now is a consultant who travels the country to talk to schools - including Ricky’s.

"It’s not that bullying is any worse today," she says. "The impulse for cruelty is the same impulse. The only difference is that the tools to achieve that have become more sophisticated."

But all the attention over cyberbullying is "a double-edged sword. In one respect, America is finally waking up. And yes, it’s due in large part to the Internet. The flipside of that is it’s also motivating a lot of kids to be meaner. Because in their minds, it is such a cool tool to show off how mean they can be."

’World’s Oldest Blogger’ Dies in Australia at 108

An Australian woman described as the world’s oldest Internet blogger has died at the age of 108 after posting a final message about singing "a happy song" in her nursing home.

Olive Riley "passed away peacefully on July 12 and will be mourned by thousands of Internet friends and hundreds of descendants and other relatives," a note on her website said.

Riley had posted more than 70 entries on her blog from Woy Woy on the east coast since February last year, sharing her thoughts on modern life and her experiences living through the entire 20th century.

Born in the outback town of Broken Hill on October 20 1899, she lived through two world wars and raised three children while doing various

jobs, including ranch cook and barmaid.

In her final post on June 26, she wrote: "I can't believe I've been here in this nursing home for more than a week.

"How the days have flown, even though I've been in bed most of the time. I still feel weak, and can't shake off that bad cough.

"Penny, who's in the next bed to mine, had a visit one day this week from her daughter, who's a professional singer. Guess what happened! She and I sang a happy song, as I do every day, and before long we were joined by several nurses, who sang along too. It was quite a concert!"

Riley's blog, initially on www.allaboutolive.com.au and more recently at http://worldsoldestblogger.blogspot.com, was "mind-blowing to her," her great grandson Darren Stone said.

"She had people communicating with her from as far away as Russia and America on a continual basis, not just once in a while," he told the national AAP news agency.

"She enjoyed the notoriety - it kept her mind fresh."

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